



The Dream and Its Demise

Chuck and Dave, two planning & scheduling engineers, meet at a project management conference and end up discussing the tricks of their trade

CHUCK: So, what have you been doing since you left the university?

DAVE: I finally landed a job at a big-name construction company. I'm Manager of Planning and Control—and I've gotten everything computerized to the max. We've got the latest programs galore for range estimating and whatnot, you name it.

CHUCK: We're doing something like that ourselves. I handle planning and scheduling for my company. The computers do everything for you: finance, payment, accounting with subcontractors, bid checking and comparison of subcontractors' bids. Hmmm, when you think about that, this conference is child's play.

DAVE: Yes, it really seems a waste of time.

CHUCK: Hey, that reminds me...do you remember Hank, the guy in our class? He works as a project manager with us.

DAVE: You don't say...well, even at school he had managerial airs.

CHUCK: After six months of work he's already two months behind. I visited him yesterday with the latest plan updates, and what do I find? The original plan, already turned yellow. I told him there was a new one, he should take the old one off the wall. Tell me, why do we bother preparing updates?

DAVE: Listen to this one: We had a big project—four schedulers working on it. Full details. Due to time pressures, site representatives couldn't be involved in the planning. Close to execution we finally had a meeting with the project manager. At the end he got up and walked off. I stopped him on the way out and said, "Wait a minute. You forgot the plans." "Oh," he answered, "keep them in your office."

CHUCK: One of my project managers went one better than that. He came running after me to the car carrying the plans I had brought him. "You forgot these," he said. Then they're all surprised when things don't run according to schedule. They simply ignore the updates.

DAVE: We peer as far as possible into the future, and work out the fine details, just the way the textbook said to. And what do they tell us? They don't understand it. Every detail is spelled out for them—what else do they need?

CHUCK: Know what this one project manager does to me? I work like crazy, my superiors are pleased as punch, but when I come to see the project manager all I get is a sour face. The plans are too late to do any good for the first week, not relevant; so the plans for the rest don't fit either, and he can't use them. Why was I late? Because I worked on his plans, that's why!

DAVE: They don't learn from experience. Everything is trial and error all over again. Well, looks like they're calling us back in. Another lecture.

CHUCK: What now?

DAVE: "Project Planning and Scheduling—The Dream and its Demise" by Alex Laufer.

CHUCK: I think I'll take the afternoon off. I've had enough experience with these clever Ivory Tower guys. Besides, I don't know what "demise" supposedly happened to the "dream" of scheduling. Scheduling's never been better.

DAVE: Yeah...when I think back on what the company looked like before I joined and how things are now, with all the computerized stuff; it's like night and day. If we could just find a program to replace those project managers...